

# Writing and Publishing in Economics

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# Outline

- Who are Economists?
- Types of Publications
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- Where to Submit Your Paper
- What Do You Need to Submit?
- Panorama of Economics Journals by Impact Factor
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# Who are Economists?

- Economists are employed by a number of different types of research institutions:
  - University economics department (with affiliated centers)
  - Think tanks (e.g., World Bank, IMF, IFPRI, many others...)
  - Government agencies (Economics departments at central banks, ...)
  - Industry: Microsoft (operations research), Google (auctions), IBM (computational economics)
- Many but certainly not all aim to establish their reputations by publishing papers
  - Citations counts establish their reputations (if people cite you, you are influencing thought in the profession)

# Types of Publications: Different Outlets

- Types of documents in terms of the extent and rigor of peer-review:
  - (1) Journal Articles (peer-reviewed except for conference proceedings)
  - (2) Books (typically after published)
  - (3) Collective Volume Articles (a range of review processes)
  - (4) Dissertations (reviewed by the members of the graduate committee)
  - (5) Working and Discussion Papers in Economics (not peer-reviewed)
  - (6) Conference proceedings, selected presentations, posters (not peer-reviewed)
  - (7) Book Reviews (not peer-reviewed)
- Many of these various types of publications starts out as “working papers”: early drafts circulated for comments
- Often, the first citations you will receive come while your paper is a working paper, so be careful about what you put out

# Types of Publications: Journals by Subject, Level of Technicality, and Audience

- General interest journals (very technical)
- Field journals: macroeconomics, econometrics, industrial organization, public economics, development, resource, international, financial, game theory, regulation, health, empirical methods, .... (very technical)
- Interdisciplinary journals: management and operations, water resources, environment, accounting, consumer behavior, psychology, ...
- Journals w/ shorter articles: economics letters, applied economics letters, etc.
- General and field review journals: journal of economic literature, agricultural and resource economics reviews, ... (less technical)
- General and field review journals for interdisciplinary audience and practitioners: journal of economic perspectives, applied economic perspectives and policy, ... (not technical)

Read what the editors say about the journal, and read their articles, to see if your work would fit well there

# Observing Research: Learning From Others

- Being exposed to research can trigger great ideas – about topics, methods, robustness checks, or even ways of framing or defending a particular method used in your work
- As a result, search out opportunities to learn from others:
  - Attending seminars at your university
  - Traveling to (international) conferences
  - Presenting at an intimate workshop or giving a talk in a seminar you are invited to give (usually allows for longer presentations and better feedback)
  - Reading papers in journals in which you aspire to publish
  - Accept invitations to referee a paper for a journal, and write a good report
  - Read blog posts summarizing research, giving tips about writing and publishing, etc (my favorite: the Development Impact blog at the World Bank)

# Observing Research: Learning From Others

- Talk to those already in your network
  - Develop a group of peers with whom you regularly share your work
  - Listening to the research of close colleagues and providing feedback to them can sharpen your thinking in ways that will help your own work
  - But getting feedback is a two-way street; the best people to *get* feedback from are often those to whom you can provide feedback in return
- Learn from referee reports you receive (What do referees care about? What do they not care about? What do they find convincing? What do they find hard to understand, boring, and annoying?)
  - Often referees will do you a favor for future papers you write, by teaching you what to avoid, and what to do!

# Observing Research: Take Advantage of the Explosion of Online Resources

There have been massive and recent changes in the set of tools available online for economics researchers

- Datasets: Donors, universities, journals, government, and international organizations have all made efforts to increase the availability of data. Examples include:
  - Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) (<https://dhsprogram.com/>)
  - World Bank Open Data platform (<https://data.worldbank.org/>)
- Replication files: A lot of journals now require a replication dataset and code to reproduce all results in published papers
  - This is a tremendous asset! No more guess work on what authors did or how they made their tables and plots.
  - If you like an identification strategy/ method, find a paper with replication files and teach yourself how to replicate the results.



# Observing Research: Learning From Others

## How to Write

- If you use a method, see how other well-published authors have defended use of that method in the past and mimic them
  - What words do they use to describe the method/ set up in their empirical strategy section?
  - What tests and diagnostics do they do to validate/ defend its use?
  - How do they interpret and discuss results emerging from it?
  - What type of terminology do they use?
    - Do they talk about 'correlations' by saying thing like "X is associated with Y," or "X predicts Y"? Or do they talk about causation by saying things like "X effects Y" or "X increases Y"?
- Which (if any) pioneers in the method do they cite when setting up the discussion of the method (you probably want to cite those studies, too)

# Practicing Good Professional Etiquette

- Treat other researchers the way you want to be treated (be generous with comments for others; do not be demanding on others' time)
- Do not expect anyone other than a very close friend or colleague to read multiple drafts of a paper; thank them for comments the first time and do not ask again
  - You can of course share a revised draft, but never explicitly ask for more comments
- Thank someone for oral or written feedback – even if you disagree with the point being made. It is fine to defend yourself, but do not get into a debate.
- Check out Daniel S. Hamermesh's "The Young Economist's Guide to Professional Etiquette" (1992, but still very relevant)

# Writing: What Should You Write About?

- What interests you most; otherwise you will not have the stamina and desire to work as hard as you need to publish
- Issues of significant importance (to the profession, to policy debates, etc)
- A research question for which you have a well-suited dataset and method in mind

# Writing: Can You Still Publish if you Get Statistically Insignificant Results? Yes!

- Results are interesting if they change what we believe (or “update our priors”)
  - With most public policy interventions, there is no reason that the expected impact would be zero. So there is no reason that the only interesting is a non-zero finding.
- “Precisely estimated zeros” (i.e. statistically but not economically significant) are especially interesting
- Demonstrate your own detective work to understand what explains the insignificant results.
- Recent papers with null results:
  - Cesarini et al., QJE, 2016
  - Meghir, Palme, & Simeonova, AEJ: Applied, 2018
  - Abdulkadiroglu, Angrist, & Pathak, Econometrica, 2014
  - Lucas & Mbiti, AEJ: Applied, 2014
  - de Ree et al., QJE, 2017
  - Banerjee et al., AEJ: Applied, 2015
  - Cesarini et al., Kyklos, 2015
- See: <https://blogs.worldbank.org/impac evaluations/how-publish-statistically-insignificant-results-economics>

# Writing: Clarity in Writing

- If someone reading or listening to your research does not understand it, you have done something wrong and need to correct it
- Use active and not passive voice (passive voice is unclear and lazy)
  - E.g., 'a new education policy was implemented' tells me little; 'the provincial government implemented a new education policy' tells me far more with the addition of one word.
  - You will be amazed about how much more info you can convey and how you expose for yourself things you do not know (and need to do a better job researching) when you force yourself to do this.
- Avoid long sentences; if you can possibly break a sentence into two, do it! Long sentences are:
  - Hard to follow (readers get to the end and have to refer back to the beginning to understand what you mean), so readers will walk away with less understanding
  - Make you look sloppy and less clear
- There is no excuse for typos, even if English is not your first language; it is a great idea to get your writing checked by someone
- Carry this clarity over to your oral presentation as well!

# Writing: Focus on Your Abstract and Introduction

- These are the most important parts of your paper; they tell a referee:
  - Will I find this paper interesting?
  - Does it make a contribution to the literature?
  - Will I find its methods convincing?
- If the answer to these three questions is not a confident 'Yes!', then your chances of a favorable report from the referee are close to 0
- You should write these sections of the paper so that they are accessible to any intelligent and educated economist who knows nothing about your specific topic. Better yet, write so that your (non-economist but educated), parents can understand. If you cannot write this clearly, you do not understand your own work.
- Beware the long abstract! Writing a 100 or 150 word abstract is a good exercise to make you realize what you most want your reader to know
  - Plus, many journals now require a 100 or 150 word abstract

# Writing: What Goes in Your Introduction?

- About 3-5 pages
- Structure:
  - Background and why issue is important
  - Brief statement of the results
  - Literature review (how your article relates to the previous literature)

# Writing: What Goes in the Body of Your Paper?

- 12-20 pages
- Structure:
  - More details about the background/relevant facts (may not be necessary)
  - Theoretical model of how the outcome of interest is determined (may not be applicable)
  - Empirical strategy (data, design, identification strategy, econometric model, summary statistics)
  - Empirical results
  - Robustness checks



# Writing: What Goes in Your Conclusion?

- 1-3 pages
- Structure:
  - Brief summary of the issue
  - Brief summary of the main findings
  - Brief summary of limitations
  - Generalizability of the findings to other settings
  - Directions for future research

# Where to Submit Your Paper?

- How patient are you? Assistant professors on a tenure clock may have less time to spare; tenured faculty or third year PhD students may a lot more. Assess your own circumstances. This determines how high to aim.
- Senior colleagues can be a great resource, especially if you have a close relationship with them and they will honestly tell you your paper's chances
  - In the process, you may ask for suggested improvements
- Generally: Aim for a journal at which there is a reasonable chance you will get referee reports (rather than a desk rejection), but which is higher-ranked than you journals where you ultimately expect you will be able to publish (be ambitious, at least at first!)
- First look at your bibliography; which journals are you citing most? Good places to start when submitting your paper
- Are there journals that have published similar/ related work recently (whether or not you are currently citing it)? Those are also good place
  - But first, be sure to ADD citations of those papers to yours!

# What Do You Need to Submit?

- Submission is always online; sometimes there is a fee (payable online by credit card), but this is not common
- For a first submission, submitting a cover letter is not necessary, but it does not hurt.
- I often submit a very brief message (please consider the following paper, “X”, for possible publication in Y) in the online submission form
- The journals will have a lot of formatting guidelines. Adhere to any that are easy to follow; it never hurts for your paper to already look like it’s in the style of the journal!
- *Always* adhere to abstract and article length guidelines, as well as guidelines about what to submit
  - E.g., some journals ask for 85 character ‘highlights’ summarizing your article, others ask for [JEL keywords](#), a ‘disclosure statement’ (noting no conflicts of interest)

# What Do You Need to Submit? (continued...)

- If you received funding that helped you write the paper, acknowledge it at first submission of the paper, in your cover letter or another appropriate spot
- Guidelines like the format of the bibliography citations, positioning of figures and tables, etc are more flexible (need not adhere until you get an R&R)
- Always acknowledge anyone that commented on a draft in an acknowledgements section
- Double spacing is generally a good idea unless they expressly ask for something else (it is annoying to read single spaced manuscripts)
- Shorter papers have a slight advantage (and *never* go over a stated limit)
  - Generally, with double spacing, you should not submit a paper over 30 pages not including tables/ bibliography (rough guideline)

# Panorama of Economics Journals by Impact Factor

Title	H index	Total Cites (to 3 last years)	2-Year Impact Factor	3-Year Impact Factor
Econometrica	98	661	3.37	3.78
Journal of Political Economy	96	402	3.08	4.47
American Economic Review	135	2,350	2.94	3.71
Judgment and Decision Making	14	476	2.69	2.82
Journal of Behavioral Decision Making	39	264	2.54	2.87
Economic Journal	80	722	2.12	2.77
International Economic Review	49	268	1.82	1.9
European Economic Review	68	386	1.81	2
Cambridge Journal of Economics	37	323	1.78	1.85
Journal of Risk and Uncertainty	38	166	1.72	2.31
RAND Journal of Economics	57	229	1.62	1.92
Journal of Economics and Management Strategy	35	155	1.43	1.41
Journal of Econometrics	80	832	1.4	2.07

See:

<https://www.journals.elsevier.com/journal-of-socio-economics/news/editorial-the-impact-factor-and-ranking>

# The State of Development Journals 2018: Quality, Acceptance Rates, Review Times, and Representation

- This is based on the below, by David McKenzie:

<https://blogs.worldbank.org/impactevaluations/state-development-journals-2018-quality-acceptance-rates-review-times-and-representation>

# Is this a Good Quality, High Visibility Journal in Which to Publish My Work? Check Impact Factors!

- The standard impact factor is the mean number of citations in the last year of papers published in the journal in the past 2 years
- The 5-year is the mean number of cites in the last year of papers published in the last 5 years.
- RePec's journal rankings take into account article downloads and abstract views in addition to citations

**Table 1: Impact Factors and RePec ranks**

	Impact Factor 2016	Impact Factor 2017	5 year impact factor 2016	5 year impact factor 2017	RePec rank 2016	RePec rank Feb-18
World Development	2.438	2.848	3.102	3.354	34	35
Journal of Development Economics	1.837	1.889	2.905	3.305	26	20
World Bank Research Observer	1.667	2.150	2.075	3.118	95	93
Economic Development and Cultural Change	1.392	0.875	1.638	1.508	131	123
World Bank Economic Review	1.182	1.431	2.057	1.938	46	45
Journal of Development Studies	0.896	1.134	1.253	1.520	122	142
Journal of African Economics	0.621	0.905	0.928	1.103	223	193
Journal of Development Effectiveness	0.400	0.484	0.927	1.007	537	585
IZA Journal of Development and Migration	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Economia-Lacea	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	126	116
Development Policy Review		0.7				419

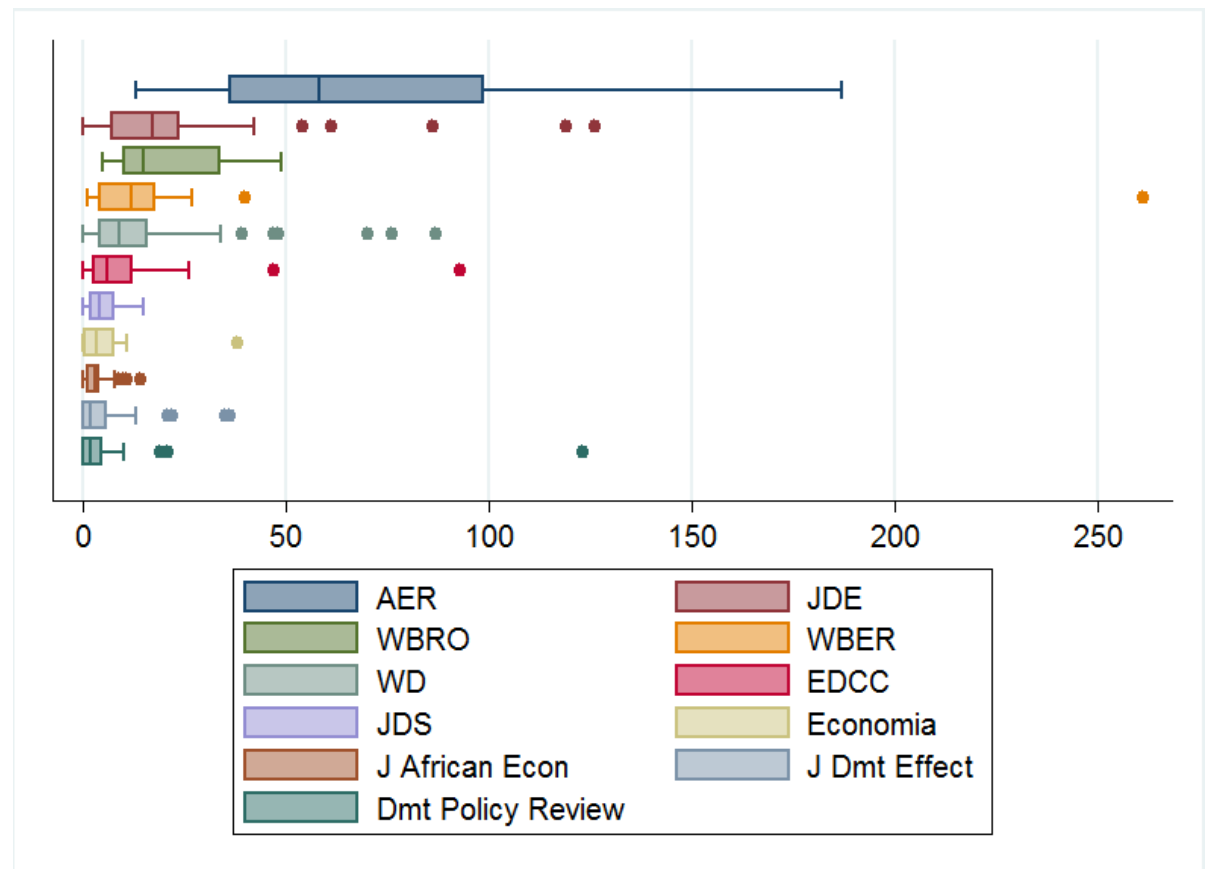
n.a. denotes not available.

Note: impact factors published in 2017 are for 2016, and similarly those published in 2016 were for 2015.

RePec rankings accessed 24 February 2018 from <https://ideas.repec.org/top/top.journals.all.html>

# How Much Does Journal Quality Matter for Citations?

- Boxes show the 25th percentile, median, and 75th percentiles
- Each one of the development journals listed here has at least one paper cited more than at least one paper in the AER, and the standard deviation is larger than the mean for eight of the ten
- Good news? You do not need to publish in the AER to get cited!





# What Are the Chances of a Paper Being Accepted?

- This presents averages for 12 of the top development journals
- On average, lower- ranked journals are likely to have higher acceptance rates
- None of these journals changes a submission fee

**Table 2: Acceptance Rates at Different Development Economics Journals**

	Annual # Submissions		Annual # Published		Acceptance Rate	
	2016	2017	2016	2017	2016	2017
World Bank Economic Review	400	449	21	36	5 to 7	6.2
Economic Development and Cultural Change	421	434	24	25	5.7	9
Journal of Development Economics	1313	1344	80	72	6	5.28
Journal of African Economics	424	421	26 (a)	25 (a)	7.5	6
World Development	2300	2362	183	279	9 to 12	13.5
Journal of Development Studies	1100	1277	107	127	11	12
World Bank Research Observer	50	n.a.	9	n.a.	18	n.a.
Economia-Lacea	52	43	13	13	20	23(b)
Journal of Development Effectiveness	91	n.a.	29	19	25	n.a.
IZA Journal of Development and Migration (d )	61	74	19	24	31.1	32
Development Policy Review		235		40 (c )		20
Development Engineering		49		13		23

Notes:

(a) The journal also published 8 papers in a conference supplement each year

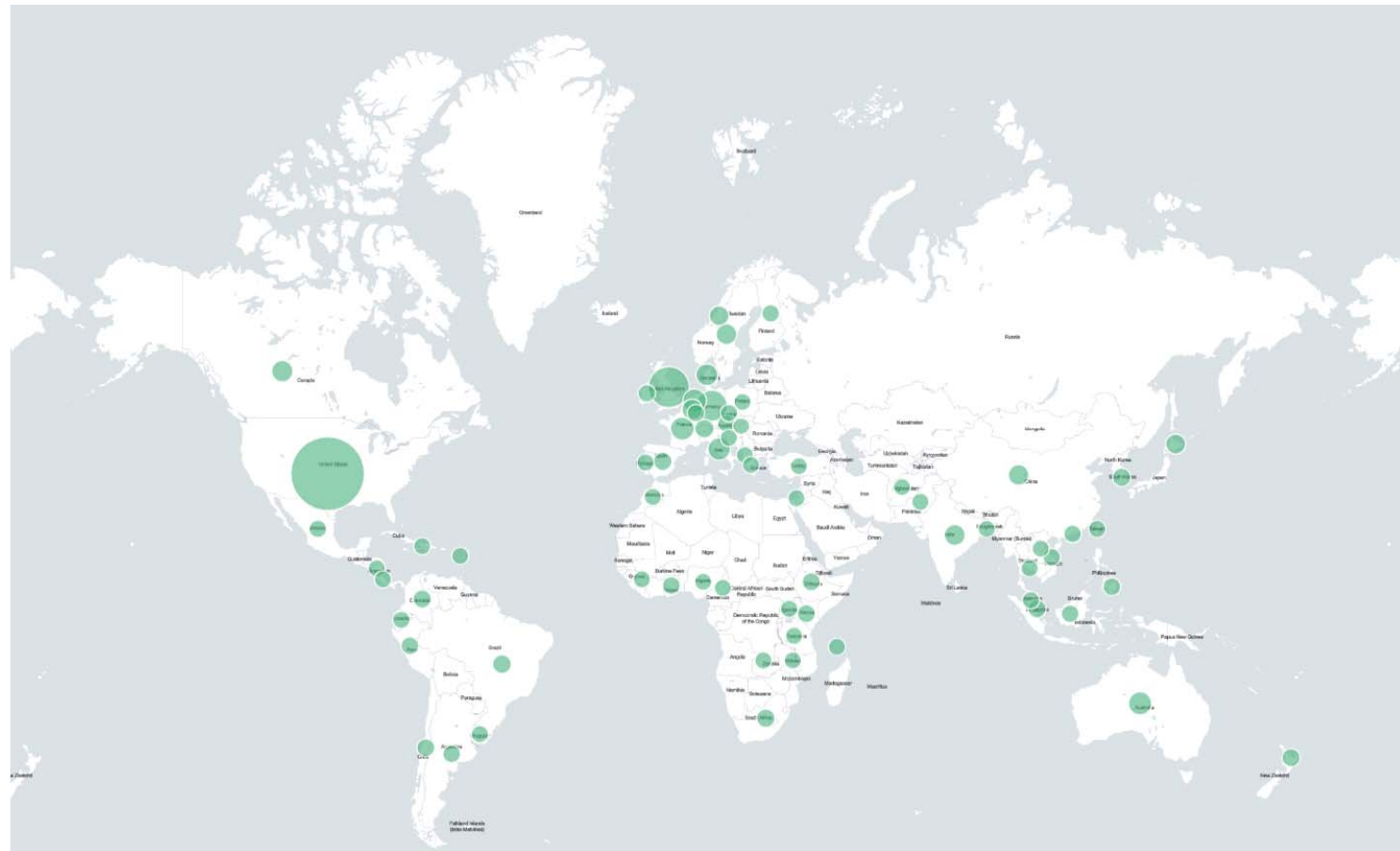
(b) 14 % of papers submitted in 2017 were accepted in 2017, and editor estimates another 9-14% will be accepted

(c ) Note that the journal also published 21 papers in an online only supplement

(d ) 2016 numbers are for IZA Journal of Labor and Development, which merged in 2017 with IZA Journal of Migration.

# What About Developing Country Authors?

- *World Development* has mapped where submitting authors are from (this is for the last 5 years)
- Other journals provide means for *share of submitting authors* who are from a developing country:
  - WBER: 28%
  - Dev. Policy Rev: 50%
  - JDE: 43%
- Note that these are a lower bound on involvement of developing country authors (they may be non-submitting authors)



# Who Is Getting Published?

**Table 4: Who got published in 2017?**

	percent sole-authored	% with a developing country author	% with at least one female author
Journal of Development Economics	25.4	8.5	46.5
Economic Development and Cultural Change	20.8	33.3	62.5
World Bank Economic Review	5.6	33.3	61.1
World Development	14.2	28.0	57.6
Journal of Development Studies	29.1	26.8	52.8
World Bank Research Observer	25.0	12.5	37.5
Journal of Development Effectiveness	8.0	44.0	64.0
IZA Journal of Development and Migration	20.0	12.0	64.0
Journal of African Economics	24.0	36.0	64.0
Economia-Lacea	0	84.6	61.5
Development Policy Review	25.0	25.0	65.0
Development Engineering	7.7	46.2	46.2

*Note: first 6 issues of the year only counted for World Development when looking at developing country authors and female authors*

# The Review Process: How Long Does it Take?

- Desk rejections generally come in <1 month—possibly 2 months. If you have not heard back by then, it is usually a high likelihood that you will get referee reports.
- Online submission systems will usually tell you where your paper is in the queue:
  - Not yet out for review (you could still get a desk rejection, or it could go out for review)
  - Out for review (which means you can expect reports)
- If you are going to be getting referee reports, expect about 4 months. Less is uncommon. 4-6 months is not *uncommon*. Greater than 6 months is relatively uncommon.
- Turn around time varies by journal, and also varies over time within a given journal. It can depend on submissions volume, editor quality (are they taking too long to desk reject papers, or to find referees?), whether referees are returning reports on time, the pressure the journal editorial team feels to reduce the time it takes (e.g., to keep up with peers), etc.
- Many journals have begun publishing turn-around time
  - But beware: averages do not reveal considerable variation
  - Plus, if you are operating on information a colleague tells you, it might be outdated!

# The Review Process: How Long Does it Take?

## Some Data

**Table 3: Time for Review at Different Development Journals**

Journal	Desk reject rate	Acceptance rate conditional on going to referees	Mean time to first decision		Percent refereed in		Note
			Unconditional going to referees	Conditional on going to referees	3 months	6 months	
Journal of Development Economics	68.4	16.7	58.5 days	81.7 days	n.a.	n.a.	
Economic Development and Cultural Change	66	26.5	60 days	154 days	72%	90%	
World Bank Economic Review	78	21.0	17 days	72 days	83%	98%	a
World Development	65.6	39.2	n.a.	n.a.	~70%	~80%	e
Journal of Development Studies	>61		n.a.	71 days	>80%	close to 100%	d
IZA Journal of Development and Migration	44.6	57.8	45 days	79 days	73%	90%	
Journal of African Economics	77	26.1	n.a.	n.a.	19%	71%	
Economia-Lacea	28	31.9	114 days	148 days	42%	60%	b.
Development Policy Review	75	80.0	n.a.	n.a.	10%	n.a.	c.
Development Engineering	58	54.8	85 days	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	

a. acceptance rate conditional on going to referees is for R&Rs in progress and acceptances.

b. Percent refereed in 3 months includes desk rejects

c. Percent refereed in 3 months is conditional on going to referees

d. time to first decision is from 2016, desk reject rate was 61% in 2016 and now slightly higher

e. Editor estimates of percent refereed in 3 and 6 months.



# The Review Process: What to Do If You are Desk Rejected?

- This means that the editor decides not to share your paper with anonymous peer referees for comments. There are many reasons that this may occur, and not all relate to you. E.g.:
  - Your article does not connect to the right intellectual debates currently being waged at the specific journal you have targeted
  - The editors is personally not currently interested in this topic
  - Human beings make mistakes
- No need to respond to the journal; move on!
- Do not be discouraged; this is the fate of the vast majority of papers. If you have never been desk rejected, you have not been ambitious enough!
- Remember that one journals' trash is another journals' treasure, and there is a bit of an idiosyncratic component to the process
- Even without referee reports, sometimes the editor will provide a useful comment or two; if so, see if there is anything to learn from them that will help you select your next journal

# The Review Process: What to Do If You are Desk Rejected? (continued...)

- Give your own paper one more look and be critical; is there anything that you think might have made it be rejected, and which you should have addressed?
  - Sometimes you can get a 'fresh' perspective after not having touched a paper in a few weeks, so take advantages and be introspective!
- Resubmit quickly (even wasting 2-3 weeks at this stage wastes your time, unless you are actually making substantive revisions that you really believe will help)

# The Review Process: What to Do When You are Rejected, but Get Referee Reports?

- No need to respond to the journal; move on!
- Read the reports and figure out if there is anything that you can address with modest effort and which makes sense to do. If so, make these changes before resubmitting.
- Why make changes?
  - You have just received the gift of a wealth of advice. At least some of it is bound to be intelligent, well-reasoned, and useful
  - You could get the same referee or a similarly-minded referee, and you do not want your paper to face a criticism next time
  - Sometimes readers miss something that IS in the paper; this is a good indication that you have not highlighted it enough, and need to make sure it is clear that you did do it!



# The Review Process: What to Do When You are Rejected, but Get Referee Reports? (continued...)

- Why not make recommended changes?
  - They do not make sense or you reader clearly missed something obvious about the paper
  - Very time consuming to address, and you are not sure that future referees will agree with them
  - You do not have any time and do not anticipate having time for 3-4 more months
- Do not 'sit on' (i.e. wait to resubmit) a paper that has been rejected; get it out again
  - Have the next journal picked out, so that you lose no time after a rejection; you already have a plan!
  - (Of course, if the reports someone give you different ideas on where to submit, change your plan!)

# The Review Process: What to Do When You Get a Revise and Resubmit?

- Congratulations on your “R&R”! Many write back to the editor with thanks and commit to revising the paper, This is usually not necessary since the assumption is that you will revise the paper if they do not hear from you, but it does not hurt.
- The editor and referees are always right; generally assume that you need to do everything that they request
- Waiting too long to resubmit is to your detriment (delayed publication; editorial team could change over), but resubmitting too quickly risks perception that you did not take the revisions seriously enough
  - If given a deadline, comply with it
  - If not given a deadline, usually 3-4 months is appropriate
- Generally, we all have several papers on which we are working; R&Rs should always be at the TOP of yours list of papers to which you are devoting attention!

# The Review Process: What to Do When You Get a Revise and Resubmit? (continued...)

- Write a point-by-point response letter to the referee; be thankful for the comment, show full understanding of the recommendation and why it is valid, and be comprehensive and thorough in detailing how you have addressed it
  - For some points, you may even want to describe multiple ways that you address the point
- Also write a letter to the editor, addressing any points directly from the editor and also summarizing succinctly the broad ways in which you have revised the paper in response to the referees
- Get example letters from close senior colleagues and mimic their style
- If you get conflicting recommendations:
  - See if you can sense from the editor's letter which they prefer you to follow
  - Figure out which recommendation you think makes more sense, as an economist
- What if results fall apart when implementing a recommendation?
  - Consider why they fall apart
  - How valid is the recommendation?
  - Is there some other way of addressing the referee's concern?
  - Is it possible *okay* if results are weaker? You must be the judge

# The Review Process: What to Do When You Get a Revise and Resubmit? (continued...)

- What if you think of other changes to make not requested by the referee?
  - If minor, just make them (e.g., citing additional papers, adding a robustness check, re-arranging the paper)
  - If major, you may wish to alert the editor in your letter to them
- After you revise your paper you will naturally introduce a lot of typos and errors; do a clean read of the paper and response letters afterwards – preferably a couple of days after completing revisions and when your eyes are fresh!
- Expect to wait to hear back for a little less time than in the first round
- When you hear back a second time, the editor may send the reports back to the referees for a second round of comments and ask that you respond to them, may merely provide comments herself/himself that you need to respond to, or may conditionally accept the paper (meaning you do not need to do anything further)

# The Review Process: Following “Conditional Acceptance”

- You may correspond with the journal office a bit (clarifications, requests on formatting)
- The journal will format your article and give you “gallies” (page proofs); check these carefully – you will NOT get a chance to make edits after you sign off on these
- ALL co-authors should sign off on these; if you are the ‘lead’ author, you should ensure that your co-authors get a copy and okay them
- You will need to sign a license giving legal rights for the publication; you will be contacted
- The paper will appear online as a “forthcoming” paper before it receives a volume number, issue number, and year
- Publicize your work! As soon as it is online, blog about it, tweet about it, put it on facebook; you will increase your citation count